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# In the Shadows: A Content Analysis of the Media's Portrayal of Gender in Far-Right, Far-Left, and Jihadist Terrorists

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## ABSTRACT

Women are underrepresented in the mass media and are most frequently portrayed in stereotypical and limited ways. Recent efforts to expand our understanding of the media's representation of gender have examined the characterization of women in crimes stories as both victim and offenders. One avenue of this research focuses on the portrayal of women involved in terrorism. Although this body of research is limited and has been strictly qualitative, it has provided a useful framework for the current study. The current study sought to expand prior research on the media's representation of gender and crime by systematically testing the six frames identified by Brigitte Nacos. As argued by Nacos, these six frames are used by the media to explain women's involvement in terrorism. Using the United States Extremist Crime Data Base (ECDB), this study analyzed the news media articles that covered male and female perpetrators between the years of 1990 and 2016 from far-right, animal/environmental rights and jihadist movements. Findings indicated limited support for the original frames identified by Nacos. However, significant differences were found in the terrorist for the sake of love frame, such that female perpetrators were more likely to be presented through this frame. The current study identified two new frames used by the media to discuss perpetrators of terrorism, which included the disregarded frame, and the overshadowed frame. Of new frames identified in the current study, the overshadowed frame had large statistically significant differences between male and female perpetrators.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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Media in many forms (news, television, advertisements, etc.) is entrenched in the fabric of our society and research has indicated that more time is devoted to media than any other “waking” activity (Roberts 2000). Because it is such an integral part of our lives, the influence that media has on our identity, beliefs, and understanding of the world around us is significant. Research has shown that media is gendered, meaning that there is a large difference in the way media represents men and women and, consequently, is the most powerful and pervasive influence on how we as a society view men and women (Richardson and Wearing 2014; Wood 1994). Due to this, the media's representation of gender is one of the primary avenues that gender scholars have used to examine the cultural and social construction of gender. Historically, women have been relatively invisible in the media when compared with their male counterparts (Tuchman 1978). However, when they are visible, they are most frequently portrayed as “household functionaries” or as “men's domestic adjuncts” (Busby 1975). Depictions of men and masculinity are different such that they construct an image of strength, dominance and aggressive behaviors (Messner, Dunbar, and Hunt 2000; Wood 1994).

Recent efforts to deepen our understanding of the media's representation of gender have looked at the representation of female criminals in the media (Benson and Gottschalk 2015; Collins 2016; Easta, Holland, and Judd 2015; Gottschalk and Smith 2015; Howe 1997; Lloyd and Ramon 2017).

This literature has primarily sought to understand if and how women are characterized in the media in regard to their criminal activity. Though criminal activity can be considered deviant behavior for both men and women, there tends to be more leniency when men are engaged in crime, as it more closely fits society's understanding of masculinity traits including dominance and aggressiveness. When women engage in crime, they tend to be perceived as more deviant as they are contradicting the ideals of femininity (Friedman 2008). When women do commit crime, there is a conflicting narrative that the media must construct, especially considering their stereotypical portrayals of women and femininity.

A more recent avenue of this research has looked at the media's portrayal of gender and terrorism. This literature is limited, as there are only three studies that have examined the media's representation of women in terrorism (Friedman 2008; Nacos 2005; Plaza, Rivas-Nieto, and Rey-García. 2017). Brigitte Nacos (2005) pioneered this work by arguing that the frames used to represent female terrorists were similar to the frames used when the media represents female politicians. There were six frames identified in her work, which included the physical appearance frame, the family connection frame, terrorist for the sake of love, the women's liberation/equality frame, the tough-as-males/tougher-than-men frame, and the bored, naïve, out-of-touch-with-reality frame. Nacos (2005) argued that these frames were used by the media to misrepresent female terrorists and discussed the possible negative influences of these frames on future counterterrorism policies.

The goal of this article, then, is to contribute to scholarship aimed at understanding the media's representation of gender and, more specifically, the ways in which the media portrays the intersections of gender and terrorism. Using the Extremist Crime Database (ECDB), this study will analyze the presentation of male and female perpetrators from far-right, far-left, and jihadist organizations (15 female/15 male perpetrators from each movement) in the media. In this study, we first attempt to systematically capture the six frames identified by Nacos (2005) in her pioneering work on the media's representation of female terrorists. In addition, we attempt to identify other salient frames that were present in the media's coverage of terrorists, but were not identified by Nacos.

## The representation of gender in the media

The media has a long history of pushing a narrative of traditional masculinity and femininity through the construction of stereotypical ideas of what it means to be a man and a woman (Gauntlett 2002; Gill 2007; Krijnen and Bauwel 2015; MacKinnon 2003; Richardson and Wearing 2014). In many forms of media, including advertisements, newspapers, magazines, television, movies, and music, scholars have recognized that the representations of men and women in the media are distinct, and that these differences are a larger illustration of the inequality between men and women in society (Gauntlett 2002). The large differences between the representations of gender can be seen in both the *frequency* and *nature* of the representation of men and women (Gunter 1995). Due to these vast differences in the representations of gender in the media, scholars have concluded that media is gendered (Ross 2010; Wood 1994).

Women's representation in media has been characterized by invisibility, dependence, and submissiveness. Tuchman (1978) suggested that the representation of women in media was symbolic annihilation, meaning that women are not equally represented, and when they are represented, they are confined to traditional stereotypical roles. The media underrepresents women, in terms of frequency of representation compared to men (Baumann and de Laat 2012; Davis 1982; DeLouth et al. 1995; Greenwald 1990; Humprecht and Esser 2017; Krijnen and Van Bauwel. 2015; Lont and Bridge 2004; Luebke 1985; Potter 1985; Shor et al. 2015). Research has documented this underrepresentation in newspapers for the past four decades. In fact, The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), the world's longest longitudinal research on gender equality in the news, has consistently reported the underrepresentation of women in the media since 1995. Although there was a gradual increase in representation from 1995 to 2010, they reported a halt in the progress of

equal representation in the media from 2010 to 2015 (GMMP 2015). Regardless of the fact that women and men make up equal proportions of our society, the media often creates a false narrative that men vastly outnumber women by showing men much more than women.

Although often underrepresented, when women are in the media there is a consistent stereotypical narrative of women and femininity (Collins 2011; Gauntlett 2002; Gill 2007; Gunter 1995; Richardson and Wearing 2014; Wood 1994). The narrative depicts women as white, young, thin housewives whose existence are defined by their relationships with her family and housework (Wood 1994). Women are commonly depicted as passive, objects, weak, and dependent on a man (Busby 1975; Collins 2011; Gauntlett 2002; Gill 2007; Gunter 1995; Lauzen, Dozier, and Horan 2008; Richardson and Wearing 2014; Wood 1994), and when they break the traditional stereotypical roles and are portrayed as working women that they are often condemned and trivialized (Tuchman 1978). Furthermore, women are also frequently sexualized in media, with a strong emphasis on their sexual appearance and appeal (Ward 2016). Research also indicates differences that different types of media represent women in certain ways. For example, women in television and movies are often shown as weak, in need of protection, and dependent on the male lead characters, while women in advertising and magazines are portrayed in stereotypical housewife gender roles, with an emphasis on beauty (Gauntlett 2002). Although different types of media may portray women differently, there is still the overarching issue that the portrayals of women and femininity are constructed in ways that trivialize, disrespect, and generalize women.

The representation of men and masculinity in the media can be characterized by almost the exact opposite of women's representation: visibility, independence, and strength. Regardless of the media type, men's prominence and representation in the media greatly surpasses that of women's (Baumann and de Laat 2012; Humprecht and Esser 2017; Lont and Junior Bridge 2004; Potter 1985; Shor et al. 2015). The media's consistent portrayal of more men than woman and men as the social standard is a symbolic illustration of the inequality between men and women in society.

When men are represented in the media, there is a consistent stereotypical narrative of men and masculinity (Craig 1992; Gauntlett 2002; Gunter 1995; MacKinnon 2003; Richardson and Wearing 2014; Wood 1994). However, this narrative does not limit or diminish the value of men in the same way it does for women. From war films to classic westerns, to the Bond films, men have been long represented as heroic, tough and hyper masculine (MacKinnon 2003). They are most frequently presented as active, powerful, and confident in the media (Gauntlett 2002; Wood 1994). Masculinity in the media embodies strength, independence, and even at times dominance. Although men are arguably represented in more positive ways than women (independent, confident, etc.), they can also be portrayed in undesirable ways (e.g. as violent or aggressive).

Media depictions not only favor the narrative of the "manliest men" but the media rarely portrays men doing stereotypical female activities, such as housework or cooking (Wood 1994). Additionally, when the media has representations of men that do not adhere to the stereotypical narrative of masculinity, there are common distinctions that this behavior is atypical. For example, research has shown that newspapers representations of eating disorders in men, which do not fit the stereotypical narrative of masculinity, use language to ensure that eating disorders are "gender anomalous" for men (MacLean et al. 2015). In essence, the media both forces a narrative of masculinity and anti-femininity for men.

## Gender in crime stories

Several studies have looked at the media's representation of gender in crime stories, emphasizing women as both victims and offenders of crime. Paralleled with the media's general representation of women, there is a trend in crimes stories of both underrepresentation of women and a stereotypical narrative constructed by the media that trivializes women. As victims of crime, women tend to be represented in the media as either "bad victims" or "good victims", which is accompanied by a great deal of victim blaming. There is also a trend in the media's underrepresentation of women of color

as victims, as they are deemed “deserving victims” compared to white women who are often depicted by the media as “undeserving victims” (Neely 2015). The media also frequently fails to discuss or frame the underlying social causes of the trend in violence against women (Collins 2016; Eastaale, Holland, and Judd 2015; Howe 1997; Lloyd and Ramon 2017).

As perpetrators of crime, women are often underrepresented in their criminal activity (Benson and Gottschalk 2015; Gottschalk and Smith 2015). Research has looked at the representation of women in different types of crimes, including white-collar, sexual offending, interpersonal violence, murder, and violence against women (Benson and Gottschalk 2015; Christensen 2018; Gottschalk and Smith 2015; Landor and Eisenchlas 2012; Lloyd and Ramon 2017; Seal 2010). When women are represented in the media, they are most frequently depicted as interlopers, more masculine, or sexualized as bad girls, of all which depends on the context of the situation and type of crime (Collins 2016; Friedman 2008; Nacos 2005). Although there can be different representations of women depending on the type of crime, the media still creates a stereotypical narrative of women that is often a deceptive representative of women as victims and offenders.

Research in this area has considered the ways in which the media represents female offenders of terrorism. In her pioneering work on the representations of female terrorists, Brigitte Nacos pointed out similarities between the representation of female politicians and female terrorists in the mass media. Nacos (2005) conducted a content analysis of both print and broadcast news and existing literature on female terrorist. Using LexisNexis and Proquest, Nacos (2005) examined news and articles that resulted from searches that included these phrases, “female terrorist,” “woman (as) terrorist,” “women (as) terrorist,” and “female suicide bomber”. In doing this, Nacos (2005) argued that female terrorists are presented within six frames. These frames include the physical appearance frame, the family connection frame, terrorist for the sake of love, the women’s liberation/equality frame, the tough-as-males/tougher-than-men frame, and the bored, naïve, out-of-touch-with-reality frame. Each of these frames of female terrorists has parallels with the representations of female politicians, as women in politics are frequently represented in a similar manner. Furthermore, these frames that are relevant for both female terrorists and politicians are often the opposite of the frames created in the media’s representation of male terrorists and politicians.

There have been a few notable studies that have also looked at the media’s representation of gender and terrorism. Friedman (2008) looked at the portrayal of female suicide bombers in four US news sources from 2002 to 2004. This research primarily looked at the media’s depiction of the motives of female suicide bombers. In her analysis of 120 articles, Friedman (2008) reported five themes that were most frequently used to explain the motivations of female suicide bombers. These included strategic desirability, the influence of men, revenge, desperation, and liberation. These findings support a few (influence of men, desperation, liberation) of the frames identified by Nacos (2005) while adding new elements of the media’s representation of female terrorists. Friedman (2008) concludes that while female suicide bombers challenge commonly shared ideas of women and femininity, the media frequently reinforces the ideals of women by responding with disbelief of female suicide bombers.

The most recent study to investigate the characterization of women terrorists was conducted on Spanish newspapers (Plaza, Rivas-Nieto, and Rey-García. 2017). Using 50 newspapers, this qualitative study looked at the similarities in the type of frames used in American and Spanish news. Their findings suggested new interpretive frames from the Spanish newspapers, including women as terrorists (the discourse of exceptionalism), women as recruiters (the discourse of expertise), women as victims (the discourse of sensationalism), and finally women as warriors (the discourse of bravery) (Plaza, Rivas-Nieto, and Rey-García. 2017). They also reported some similarities in the original frames identified by Nacos (2005) in the Spanish newspaper. These included the physical appearance frame, the family connection frame, and the tough-as-males/tougher-than-men frame but failed to find the terrorist for the sake of love frame, the women’s liberation/equality frame, and the bored, naïve, out-of-touch-with-reality frame in Spanish newspapers. These findings provide insight into the cross-cultural representation of women and terrorism and provide support for half

of Nacos (2005) original arguments in regard to the frames that media creates for female terrorists. While there have been three qualitative studies that have looked at the media's representation of woman terrorists (Friedman 2008; Nacos 2005; Plaza, Rivas-Nieto, and Rey-García. 2017), to date no study has quantitatively tested the six frames identified by Nacos (2005) in American newspapers.

## Methodology

### *Current study*

Past research has found that there are significant differences in the media's representation of gender, particularly concerning the underrepresentation of women and the stereotypical narratives of masculinity and femininity. Recent research has extended these ideas to examine the media's depictions of gender in crime stories. This research has indicated that there are varying representations of women depending on the type of crime and the context of the situation, including depictions as interlopers, more masculine, or sexualized as bad girls. Furthermore, research has indicated that the media still creates a stereotypical narrative of women as victims and offenders. One avenue of this research has looked at the media's representation of women involved in terrorists' organizations. While there have been qualitative studies that have explored the media's representation of female terrorists (Friedman 2008; Nacos 2005; Plaza, Rivas-Nieto, and Rey-García. 2017), there has been no quantitative study of this phenomena. Taken together, this research provides the foundations for the current study.

Although Nacos (2005) and other scholars have provided keen insights into the images of female terrorist in the news, there are important research gaps that remain. First, although there is a growing body of research on terrorism studies generally, there are few studies on media coverage of terrorism (Silke 2004). The current study will add to an area of terrorism research that is understudied, specifically considering the emphasis on female perpetrators. Second, over the past decade there has been a growing interest in research that attempts to understand the role of women in terrorist organizations (Alexander 2017; Bloom 2011a, 2011b; O'Rourke 2009; Rajan 2011; Skaine 2006; Speckhard 2008), but there still remains little research on how and what the media portrays about them, especially from a comparative perspective. The goal of this article, then, is to bridge the gap between two literatures, including the gender and terrorism literature and the portrayal of gender in the media literature. Finally, in her study, Nacos (2005) studied the frames by searching websites such as LexisNexis and Proquest as well as looking at broadcast news to find media related to female terrorists. In this study, we extend this work by taking a random sample of news articles from case files associated with perpetrators and analyze a larger number of newspaper articles in attempts to have a more representative sample of news coverage.

The current study fills these identified research gaps in the below analysis and discussion. This study will analyze the media's representation of male and female perpetrators of violent terrorist acts by using data from the United States Extremist Crime Data Base (ECDB). More specifically, this study will analyze the news media that covered the perpetrators of illegal violent incidents from far-right extremists, jihadist extremists, and far-left extremists between the years of 1990 and 2016. The current study will test how the media represents the six frames outlined by Nacos (2005). It will also consider other frames that were identified in the analysis that parallel findings from the gender and media literature.

### *Data and methods*

In order to study the media's representation of gender in terrorist organizations, media documents related to extremist perpetrators were examined. The sample of perpetrator studied and media documents about them were pulled from the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB). The ECDB was constructed by first identifying crimes from various sources in an attempt to create a list of illegal



financial schemes and illegal violent incidents by extremists in the United States (Freilich et al. 2014). These sources included existing terrorism databases, official sources (FBI, DOJ), scholarly and journalistic accounts, material published by private watch groups and media publications. While there are many conflicting definitions of terrorism, this database defines acts of terrorism through a two-pronged test: the crime had to be either an illegal violent incident or illegal financial scheme from 1990 to 2016 (behavioral prong) and at least one of the suspects had to be subscribed to an extremist belief system (attitudinal prong) (Freilich et al. 2014). Opposed to other databases and definitions of terrorism, the ECDB is unique such that it specifically includes illegal financial schemes, as they recognize the financial loss of over \$700,000,000 that has been perpetrated by far-right and jihadist perpetrators.

Once these crimes were identified, each case, suspect, and victim were searched to uncover relevant open source information. Each incident included in the ECDB was searched through 26 search engines, and all available open source material was compiled about it. The materials compiled for each incident provides an excellent source of materials and all news articles written about an incident and the perpetrators involved in the incident. Both inter-rater reliability and selectivity bias were critically considered in the creation of the ECDB. To increase inter-rater reliability, there was a strict procedure set into place for the multiple coders. Also, a measurement of the inter-rater reliability was created which indicated coder agreement between 89% and 98% of the time. To deal with selectivity bias, the creators examined the sources used to identify the crimes and “normalized their criteria to accurately assess variations in the events they included” (Freilich et al. 2014). In doing this, the creators of the ECDB report that selectivity bias was less of a problem than originally perceived (Chermak et al. 2012).

For this study, a list of all males and females from the ECDB was generated from the database. The list was stratified by ideological type (far right, far left, and jihadi) and gender, and then 15 males and 15 females from each type were randomly selected. Media articles about the male and female were then collected from the ECDB case files. Each news article was then counted and documented. There is considerable variation in the number of articles written about incidents as some of the cases in the ECDB are celebrated (e.g. the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks) and others have a small number of articles. In order to account for the variation, this study randomly selected three newspaper articles from the case file. In randomly sampling three articles on each perpetrator, all types of news articles were available for selection, including local and global news sources. The news articles associated with each offender within each file were used to systematically analyze how the media represents gender for men and women.

The content of each newspaper article was then systematically analyzed for the six major frames identified by Nacos (2005). The text in the articles was used to identify how each perpetrator is being represented by the media and then coded into a database. For example, if a news article discussed the clothing of a female perpetrator the article was coded into the physical appearance frame and if the article discussed the woman’s involvement in connection with her romantic partner the article was coded into the terrorist for the sake of love frame. Each frame was considered individually, as there could be multiple frames used to discuss a male or female perpetrator in each article. For example, within an article, both the family connection frame and the bored, naïve, out of touch with reality frame could be used to explain a sole female perpetrator. Furthermore, after creating the coding scheme for the Nacos frames, we also created a coding scheme for 2 other frames.

The current study was able to capture some of the frames identified by Nacos (2005) in an initial pretest of newspaper articles. However, this review indicated that were additional elements of the presentation that didn’t directly fit into one of her categories. Drawing on the feminist media studies, we relied on previous research that emphasizes the invisibility of women in media in developing two new frames (Global Media Monitoring Project 2015; Neely 2015; Potter 1985; Tuchman 1978). In doing this, the disregarded frame and the overshadowed frame emerged, and these frames were considered in all 270 articles analyzed. It is important to note that these frames identified, the disregarded frame and overshadowed frame, can indeed apply to the original frames identified by Nacos (2005) and may experience some overlap between the frames.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>We would also like to thank the editor and the anonymous reviewers for highlighting this issue and for their helpful comments.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of the articles (N = 270).

Variable	N	%	Mean	Std. Deviation
<i>Gender of Perpetrator</i>				
Male	135	50.0		
Female	135	50.0		
<i>Race of Perpetrator*</i>				
White	165	61.1		
Arab	42	15.6		
Black/African American	24	8.9		
Bi-Racial	3	1.1		
<i>Age of Perpetrator</i>			31.79	11.37
<i>Extremists Ideology</i>				
Far-Right	90	33.3		
Far-Left	90	33.3		
Jihadist	90	33.3		
<i>News Type</i>				
Right-Wing	13	4.8		
Left-Wing	15	5.6		
Unbiased	242	89.6		
<i>Gender of Reporter</i>				
Male	119	44.1		
Female	41	15.2		
Not Reported	110	40.7		
<i>Word Count</i>			604.42	516.34

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% because of missing cases

Table 1 provides basic demographic information about the offenders. The sample of articles covered primarily white perpetrators (61%), followed by Arab perpetrator (42%), and black/African American perpetrators (24%). For twelve of the perpetrators, race was not able to be identified or confirmed in the ECDB, the case files, or through searches on google. The mean age of the perpetrators was 31.79. The articles that were sampled covered a 25-year span and ranged in date from 11/28/1993 to 07/24/2018. The current study utilized Vanessa Otero's (2018) Media Bias Chart: Version 4.0 for the classification of right-wing, left-wing, and neutral/unbiased news. The vast majority of articles that were randomly sampled came from unbiased news sources (89%), including global and local news sources. Only around 10% of the articles were classified as either right- or left-wing news source. While there was a lack of diversity in the political leaning of news sources, the articles came from 109 different news sources. The Associated Press (67 articles), the New York Times (17 articles), and the Seattle Times (10 articles) were the most common news sources. Roughly 44% of the articles were written by a male lead author, while only 15% were written by a female lead. Additionally, 40% of the articles had no author/gender reported. The articles that were analyzed had a mean of 604 words. Along with the creation of the database, a codebook was created that provided examples of the frames identified by Nacos (2005), explanations of the variables used in the study, and the new frames found in the current study.

## Findings

After analyzing 135 newspaper articles for female perpetrators, there was little coverage of the frames identified by Nacos (2005). As shown in Table 2, only four of the six identified frames (physical appearance frame, family connection frame, terrorist for the sake of love frame, and bored, naïve, out-of-touch-with-reality frame) were found in the newspaper articles that were analyzed for women. There was no evidence in the articles that were reviewed for the women's liberation/equality frame or the tough-as-males/tougher-than-men frame. The most prevalent of the frames for female perpetrators, the terrorist for the sake of love frame, was found in only 26 of the 270 newspaper articles analyzed, which was only 19.3% of the articles. This was followed by the family connection frame (6.7%), the physical appearance frame (3.7%), and the bored, naïve, out-of-touch-with-reality



**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of the frames for female perpetrators (N = 135).

	N	%
Frames Identified by Nacos (2005)		
Physical Appearance Frame	5	3.7
Family Connection Frame	9	6.7
Terrorist for the Sake of Love Frame	26	19.3
Women's Liberation/Equality Frame	0	0.0
Tough-as-Males/Tougher-than-Men Frame	0	0.0
Bored, Naïve, Out-of-Touch-with-Reality Frame	4	3.0
Identified Frames		
Disregarded Frame	41	30.4
Overshadowed Frame	47	34.8

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics of the frames for male perpetrators (N = 135).

	n	%
Frames Identified by Nacos (2005)		
Physical Appearance Frame	6	4.4
Family Connection Frame	8	5.9
Terrorist for the Sake of Love Frame	3	2.2
Women's Liberation/Equality Frame	0	0.0
Tough-as-Males/Tougher-than-Men Frame	0	0.0
Bored, Naïve, Out-of-Touch-with-Reality Frame	3	2.2
Identified Frames		
Disregarded Frame	47	34.8
Overshadowed Frame	22	16.3

frame (3%). Although there is some coverage of the frames noted by Nacos, the interesting conclusion is that some are not covered at all in this sample of articles, and the other frames were not frequently documented in these articles.

Consistent with expectations, the vast majority of the articles that covered male perpetrators had no gendered frames identified by Nacos (2005), illustrated below in Table 3. The most frequent frame for male perpetrators was the family connection frame, which was in only 5.9% of news articles. This was closely followed by the physical appearance frame (4.4%), and then the terrorist for the sake of love frame and the bored, naïve, out-of-touch-with-reality frame, which both were in only 2.2% of news articles reviewed. Expectedly, there were no articles that had the women's liberation/equality frame or the tough-as-males/tougher-than-men frame for male perpetrators.

The current study contributed two new frames that have been identified in reviewing the newspapers 270 articles on terrorism. These frames were in response to finding little support for the frames identified by Nacos (2005). After recognizing that many of the articles that were being analyzed failed to show any of the frames identified by Nacos (2005), the current study sought to understand what themes were most frequently being utilized to explain male and female perpetrators of terrorism. Two primary frames emerged, which included the disregarded frame and the overshadowed frame. These frames emerged after seeing multiple articles that had similar trends, such as leaving out the name of the perpetrator or overshadowing the actions of the perpetrators by focusing on other aspects of the crime. These themes were consistent with the broad findings in the gender and media literature that women are often disregarded and overshadowed. These frames were identified more frequently overall when compared to the original frames identified by Nacos (2005).

The first frame identified was the "*Disregarded Frame*", which is defined as, "An article that discusses an act of terrorism, however, fails to mention the name of the perpetrator". This frame emerged after recognizing that many of the articles that were randomly sampled for a specific perpetrator failed to directly reference or mention the name of that perpetrator as the article focused on other aspects of the crime. This frame was not used when the article failed to mention the perpetrator's name because it was unknown, but because the article highlighted another perpetrator,

victim, or aspect of the crime while failing to mention the perpetrator's name and in doing so disregards the perpetrator. As shown in Tables 2 and 3, this frame was found in a total of 88 of the newspaper articles that were randomly sampled, 41 news articles of female perpetrators and 47 news articles of male perpetrators.

A prime example of the disregarded frame was in an article that was randomly sampled from the case file for Lacey Phillabaum, a far-left female terrorist who was involved in the arson at the University of Washington Center for Urban Horticulture in Seattle Washington in 2001. The news article (Case 016) which was published by the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, a local Seattle newspaper, almost eight years after the crime was committed failed to even mention the name of Lacey Phillabaum. The 789-word news article focused on two other perpetrators involved in the crime, including Brianna Waters and Justin Solondz, however, failed to discuss Phillabaum and therefore disregarded her activity in the terrorist incident. Unexpectedly, this frame was found in close to 1/3 of the news articles and was a very prevalent theme in which articles would discuss the crimes committed and give hyper-attention to a single perpetrator but fail to mention the perpetrator that had been randomly sampled.

An extension of the disregarded frame was the “*Overshadowed Frame*”, which was defined as, “An article that does reference the perpetrator however overshadows the perpetrator of a crime by giving more attention to another perpetrator or other logistical matters of the crime (basic information of the crime, court hearings, victims, etc.)”. This frame emerged when many of the articles that were randomly sampled would only briefly mention the perpetrator, and not provide additional information besides the name and age of the perpetrator. An important coding note was that if a news article had the disregarded frame, the article could not also be categorized under the overshadowed frame. These frames were mutually exclusive. The primary difference between the frames lies that the overshadowed frame had to directly reference the perpetrator, while still overshadowing the perpetrator.

As shown in Tables 2 and 3, the overshadowed frame was identified in a total of 69 of the newspaper articles that were randomly sampled, 47 for female perpetrators and 22 for male perpetrators. An example of the overshadowed frame is a news article randomly sampled from the case file of Tina Mae Stone, a far-right terrorist who was connected to the Hutaree Christina Militia and plotted to kill members of the judicial system. The article (Case 106) was published by the *Windsor Star*, a daily newspaper published in Windsor Ontario. In the 609-word article Tina's name was only mentioned once, while her husband David Stone was directly mentioned six times. In this news article and 68 others, the perpetrator was overshadowed by another perpetrator or other logistical matters relating to the crime.

In the initial analysis, t-tests were used to compare the means of male and female perpetrators for the dependent variables. The dependent variables included four of the original frames identified by Nacos and the two newly identified frames. Two of the frames, Women's Liberation/Equality Frame and Tough-as-Males/Tougher-than-Men Frame, were not used in any of the analysis because no support was found for them in the 270 articles analyzed. All of the dependent variables in the current study were coded as a binary, with “0” as no and “1” as yes. If the article included the frame the article was coded as yes, and then if the article did not have the frame the article was coded as no. The results of the comparison of means for the different frames broken down by gender are presented in Table 4.

The only significant differences in means between female and male perpetrators were found in the terrorist for the sake of love frame ( $p < .001$ ) and the overshadowed frame ( $p < .001$ ). Expectedly, there were significant differences between female and male perpetrators regarding the terrorist for the sake of love frame, such that female perpetrators were significantly more likely to have been represented in this frame when compared to male perpetrators. This finding gives support to the argument made by Nacos (2005), that female terrorists were presented in the media in a way different than men. However, it's important to note that the other frames, physical appearance frame ( $p = .759$ ), family connection frame ( $p = .803$ ), and the bored, naïve, out-of-touch-with-reality

**Table 4.** Bivariate analysis of frames and representation by gender (N = 270).

Dependent Variables	Female	Male	T-Test
Frames Identified by Nacos (2005)			
Physical Appearance Frame	.04	.04	.307
Family connection Frame	.07	.06	-.250
Terrorist for the Sake of Love Frame	.19	.02	-4.685***
Bored, Naïve, Out-of-Touch-with-Reality Frame	.03	.02	-.382
Identified Frames			
Disregarded Frame	.30	.35	.777
Overshadowed Frame	.35	.16	-3.556***
Newspaper Articles in Case Files	54.29	57.22	-.156

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

frame ( $p = .703$ ) were not significant. These findings indicate that there were no differences in the way in which the media was representing male and female perpetrators regarding these frames. While there was support found for gendered differences for the terrorist for the sake of love frame, there seems to be an overall lack of support for the frames identified by Nacos (2005) regarding gendered differences.

Similar to the terrorist for the sake of love frame, there were significant differences between the overshadowed frame for males and females, such that female perpetrators were significantly more likely to be presented by the media in an overshadowed frame when compared to male perpetrators. This shows that when women were mentioned in the article, they were significantly more likely to be overshadowed by another perpetrator, victims, or other logistical matters of the crime. This finding further indicates that there are gendered frames in which the media uses to represent gender, and more specifically female perpetrators of terrorism. While there was little support regarding the original frames identified by Nacos (2005), this new frame, the overshadowed frame, may provide insights into how the media has gendered frames in more subtle ways. It is also important to note that while there were gendered differences for the overshadowed frame, there were no differences found in the disregarded frame. Furthermore, each newspaper article was counted within each perpetrator's case file, which ranged from 3 to 431 news articles within a case file. A t-test was used to compare the means of news coverage. Since each case file was created using the same open source searching methods, we compared the means of news article coverage for male and female perpetrators. As shown in Table 4, while the male perpetrators (57.22) had a higher mean number of articles when compared to female perpetrators (54.22), there were no significant differences found.

To examine the ways in which the media represents extremist ideology through different frames, multiple ANOVAs were conducted on the dependent variables. Based on the classification in the ECDB, extremist ideology was broken up into far-right, far-left, and jihadist motivated perpetrators. Identical to the previous analysis on gender differences, the dependent variables in this analysis were all coded as a binary. The results of the comparison of means of the eight different frames across extremist ideology are presented in Table 5, which included all 270 articles covering both male and female perpetrators. The analysis indicated no significant differences across extremist ideology for the original four frames identified by Nacos (2005). Unsurprisingly, there were not large differences in the gendered frames identified by Nacos (2005) when broken down by extremist ideology.

In contrast, the disregarded frame ( $p = .012$ ) and the overshadowed frame ( $p = .028$ ) had significant differences when looking at differences in means across extremist ideology. For the disregarded frame, we found large differences between the far-left when compared to far-right and jihadist. Close to half of the articles for far-left perpetrators fit the disregarded frame, while the far-right and jihadist had only around a quarter. This indicates that far-left perpetrators are significantly more likely to be disregarded and not even mentioned in news coverage. The current study suspects this finding to be connected to the situational factors regarding the crimes committed by the far-left. Many of the crimes committed by the far-left are committed in groups of people, thus the media can only focus on some of the perpetrators.

**Table 5.** Bivariate analysis of frames by extremist ideology (N = 270).

Dependent Variables	Far-Right	Far-Left	Jihadist	ANOVA (F Value)
Frames Identified by Nacos (2005)				
Physical Appearance Frame	.04	.02	.06	.659
Family connection Frame	.07	.03	.09	1.190
Terrorist for the Sake of Love Frame	.17	.06	.10	2.968
Out-of-Touch-with-Reality Frame	.03	.01	.03	.583
Identified Frames				
Disregarded Frame	.26	.44	.28	4.462*
Overshadowed Frame	.31	.30	.16	3.619*

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

Furthermore, the overshadowed frame was significantly different across the means of extremist ideology. The analysis indicated that far-right, and far-left perpetrators had significantly higher means than jihadist perpetrators. This indicates that perpetrators classified as far-right and far-left tend to be more overshadowed when compared to jihadist perpetrators. Not only does this indicate differences in the overshadowed frame, but it indicates that when a jihadist perpetrator commits a crime, they are more likely to receive attention within a news article. This illustrates that jihadist perpetrators may receive more attention in the media, and their actions are less overshadowed when compared to far-right and far-left perpetrators.

The current study utilized multivariate binary logistic regression for two of the dependent variables as the they were coded as a binary (yes, no). The primary independent variable in all of the regression models was gender, which was coded as a binary (male = 0, female = 1). The age of the perpetrator, the year the crime was committed, and word count were all included in the models primarily as control variables. Multicollinearity was assessed on all of the variables included in the model and the date of the article was taken out of the model because it was too closely associated with the year the crime was committed. Similarly, race was not included in the models because there was such a strong overlap between race and extremist ideology, such that the nonwhite perpetrators (Arab, Black/African American, Bi-Racial) were almost all categorized as jihadist. Extremist ideology, news type, and gender of the reporter were also included in the binary logistic regression models and dummy coded. For extremist ideology, we included a far-right variable and far-left variable, each with jihadist as the reference category. For news type, we created a dummy binary variable with biased news (right-wing and left-wing) coded as 0, and unbiased news (independent, local, global, etc.) coded as 1. Finally, for the gender of the reporter, we created a dummy binary variable with male reporters and no gender reporters coded as 0, and female reporters coded as 1.

Analysis was conducted on only one of the frames identified by Nacos (2005), the terrorist for the sake of love frame. Unfortunately, because most of the frames identified by Nacos (2005) had little variance, the analysis was severely limited. It is important to note, that while analysis was conducted on the terrorist for the sake of love frame the findings were met with caution because we only found 29 articles out of 270 with this frame. The results of the binary logistic regression on the terrorist for the sake of love frame are displayed in Table 6. Of the eight variables included in the model, only two were significant. As shown, when controlling for all of the other variables in the model the odds of a female perpetrator being framed through the terrorist for the sake of love frame were 10.43 times greater than a male perpetrator. Similarly, the odds of articles that had female reporters were 4.46 times greater than articles written by male reporters and articles that failed to report the gender of the author when controlling for all other variables. Not only were articles that were written by women more likely to have this frame, but articles for female perpetrators were also more likely to have this frame. These findings give support for Nacos (2005) original argument solely regarding this frame and indicate gendered differences within the terrorist for the sake of love frame for both the perpetrators and for the reporters. Nagelkerke  $R^2$  was used as an indicator of the strength of relationships between predictors and the dependent variable. There was a moderate relationship found at .33.

**Table 6.** Binary logistic regression of the terrorist for the sake of love frame (N = 270).

Independent Variables	B	SE	Exp(B)
Female	2.34	.65	10.43***
Age	-.01	.02	.98
Year of Crime	.06	.04	1.06
Word Count	.00	.00	1.00
Far-Right	.87	.56	2.40
Far-Left	-.08	.76	.92
Unbiased News Source	.80	.85	2.22
Female Reporter	1.50	.48	4.46**
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.33		

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

**Table 7.** Binary logistic regression of the overshadowed frame (N = 270).

Independent Variables	B	SE	Exp(B)
Female	.92	.32	2.50**
Age	.01	.01	1.01
Year of Crime	.00	.03	1.00
Word Count	.00	.00	1.00*
Far-Right	1.18	.44	3.26**
Far-Left	1.14	.49	3.14*
Unbiased News Source	1.06	.67	2.90
Female Reporter	.51	.40	1.67
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.18		

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

Lastly, results of the binary logistic regression on the overshadowed frame are displayed in [Table 7](#). Half of the variables in the binary logistic regression on the overshadowed frame were significant, including gender. The model indicated that when controlling for all of the other variables in the model females were 250% more likely than males to be overshadowed. This gendered finding indicated that the media represented female perpetrators of terrorism in a different way when compared to male perpetrators. Extremist ideology was also significant, such that far-right (326%) and far left (314%) perpetrators were more likely to be overshadowed when controlling for all other variables. Word count was also a variable that was significant within the model. The Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup> for this model was at .18. This model provides the greatest insights into the media's representation of terrorism and the differences across gender and extremist ideology, such that female, far-right and far-left perpetrators were most likely to be overshadowed.

## Discussion

The findings in the current study provided the first quantitative approach in analyzing the media's representation of gender and terrorism. The analysis indicated little support for the six frames identified by Nacos (2005). While there was evidence of four of these frames within the articles analyzed, the current study found no evidence of the women's liberation/equality frame or the tough-as-males frame. Nacos (2005) original work provided insights into the ways in which the media represents female terrorists similar to female politicians, however, there does not seem to be support for the frames she identified when analyzing a large number of news articles on terrorism. In addition to testing the six frames identified by Nacos (2005), this study identified two news frames that were common in the media's representation of terrorism. These frames include the disregarded frame and the overshadowed frame.

This primary purpose of the current study was to compare the frames by gender to better understand if female perpetrators of terrorism were more likely to be represented through these

frames than male perpetrators. The two frames that emerged with the most significant gendered differences included the terrorist for the sake of love frame and the overshadowed frame. Although it is common for both male and female terrorists to have romantic partners within a terrorist organization, the findings in the current study show that the news media presents this stereotype for female perpetrators significantly more frequently than their male counterpart. The findings indicate that this frame is most common in the media's representations of far-right females. As we know from previous research, the media often represents women through their dependence on men and submissiveness, while presenting men through their independence (Wood 1994). The findings of the terrorist for the sake of love frame seem to be no different from this research, as female perpetrators of terrorism have been portrayed in the media through their dependence on their romantic relationship more frequently, while male perpetrators are not connected to their significant others and thus portrayed through their dependence.

When looking at gender differences among the newly identified frames, there were clear differences for the overshadowed frame, such that female perpetrators were significantly more likely to be overshadowed in the news coverage of their crimes. This finding is consistent with the gender and media literature that indicates that women have been often depicted as passive, objects, weak, and dependent on a man (Busby 1975; Collins 2011; Gauntlett 2002; Gill 2007; Gunter 1995; Lauzen, Dozier, and Horan 2008; Richardson and Wearing 2014; Wood 1994). In overshadowing the actions of female perpetrators of terrorism, the media is presenting them in a way that is passive and weak. Through overshadowing, the media does not have to force a narrative of a violent female terrorist which would contradict the traditional feminine image that they portray of women. Because the media tends to portray men with strength and independence, they likely have a much easier time representing acts of terrorism committed by men because it fits within their representation of men. However, with women, we suspect they tend to overshadow their actions because the media may not know how else to represent a violent female terrorist.

Furthermore, the results indicated no significant differences between male and female perpetrators for the physical appearance frame, the family connection frame, and the bored, naïve, out-of-touch-with-reality frame. These findings contradict Nacos (2005) argument that female perpetrators are presented in the media through these stereotyping and gendered frames. The current study suspects that the frames identified by Nacos (2005) would likely be more present in letters to the editor and opinion editorial news coverage, however, the majority of the news articles that were randomly sampled in the current study were straightforward editorials. While gendered clichés and frames can be present in some news coverage of terrorism, when considering the large number of articles that actually cover terrorism these frames may be significantly less influential on anti- and counterterrorism policies than Nacos (2005) suggests.

The current study also found that the female perpetrators were more underrepresented in terms of frequency of newspaper coverage when compared to male perpetrators. These findings are consistent with a long body of literature that has documented the underrepresentation of women in the media (Baumann and de Laat 2012; Davis 1982; Humprecht and Esser 2017; Krijnen and Van Bauwel. 2015; Lont and Junior Bridge 2004; Potter 1985; Shor et al. 2015). In underrepresenting women, the media often facilitates a false narrative that men vastly outnumber women in society. While a common critique of the underrepresentation of women in media is that men and women make up equal proportions in our society, it is important to recognize that women do tend to be less involved in crime and terrorism than men. Thus, the differences found in the underrepresentation of women may be more natural compared to some of the unnatural disparities research has found in the underrepresentation of women in the news and films.

These differences may also be linked to the celebration of certain terrorists' acts, where the media provides significantly more coverage. Research has indicated that the vast majority of terrorist incidents receive little to no news coverage, while specific cases, such as 9/11 and the Oklahoma Bombing, are sensationalized by the media due to certain incident-level factors (Chermak and Gruenwald 2006; Kearns, Betus, and Lemieux 2019; Mitnik, Freilich, and Chermak 2018). Gender



of the perpetrator has not been considered in this previous research likely because the vast majority (if not all) of sensationalized terrorist attacks are committed by male perpetrators. If the sensationalized cases are all committed by male perpetrators and women are less involved in terrorist activities, it is only natural that their representation in the news media is significantly less. The underrepresentation of female perpetrators found in the current study is consistent with our understanding of sensationalized cases. The current study suspects that terrorist acts committed by female perpetrators tend to not be sensationalized by the media for two primary reasons. First, female terrorists do not fit within the stereotypical narratives that the media constructs regarding gender. Secondly, the types of offenses committed by female perpetrators may have fewer casualties, and thus are less likely to be sensationalized. Future research should examine how gender plays a role in determining if an act of terrorism is sensationalized.

While gender was the primary focus of the current study, this study also considered which frames were most common across extremist ideology, including far-right, far-left, and jihadist motivated crimes. The analysis indicated no significant on the frames identified by Nacos (2005), which was expected. However, there were significant differences found across extremist ideology for the disregarded frame and the overshadowed frame. The results suggested that articles covering far-left motivated incidents had the highest frequencies of the disregarded frame. The current study suspects that this is connected to the nature in which crimes are committed, such that many of the crimes committed by the far-left are committed in groups of people and thus an individual perpetrator is more likely to be disregarded in the news coverage.

Furthermore, the results suggest that the articles covering jihadist motivated incidents had the lowest frequencies of the overshadowed frame, indicating that jihadist perpetrators tend to not be least overshadowed in the media. The current study believes that this finding is possibly connected to the United States cultural understandings of terrorism as many people fail to recognize far-right and far-left motivated incidents as terrorism. When a jihadist perpetrator commits an act of terrorism, journalist likely have an easier time explaining and focusing on each perpetrator and thus these perpetrators are not overshadowed in the media coverage. This is also likely because society is more receptive and interested in reading about a jihadist terrorist because it fits their understanding of terrorism.

### ***Strengths and limitations***

The strengths of the current study are primarily connected to the systematic and quantitative methodical approach that was used to study the media's representation of gender and terrorism. Employing both random sampling of the perpetrators and the newspaper articles greatly reduced bias that was possibly present in the previous quantitative work done. Furthermore, using case files from the ECDB and the random sampling technique allowed for news coverage of terrorism from over 100 different news sources, including small local newspapers and even the New York Times. Since media is so pervasive, including both local and national news was important as it allowed the current study to consider how all news media represents male and female perpetrators of terrorism. Finally, having news coverage of terrorism that dated back to 1993 allowed the current study to account for a 25-year range of news coverage on the media's representation of terrorism.

This study had several limitations, including the limited statistical analysis, the type of new sources primarily sampled, and the limited number of jihadist female offenders in the ECDB. As discussed, because there were so few cases of Nacos (2005) frames found in the 270 articles reviewed, the statistical analysis that was conducted was limited and should be met with caution, especially the binary logistic regression on the terrorist for the sake of love frame. Another limitation was that the vast majority (89%) of the news articles we reviewed came from unbiased new sources. Unfortunately, this could not have been controlled because it was simply a result of random sampling news articles from the respective case files. However, having a more equal distribution of unbiased new sources, right-wing, and left-wing new sources would likely have provided a more accurate representation of the media's representation of gender and terrorism. Finally, as discussed, the current study ran into a sampling issue because there were only eight identified female jihadist

perpetrators who had committed an illegal violent incident in the ECDB and fifteen were needed. To solve this issue, seven more female jihadist perpetrators were sampled from the illegal financial schemes data. Although there did not seem to be any evident differences between the media's representations between violent and financial schemes jihadist perpetrator, the current study recognizes this a sampling limitation.

A challenge of the current study is the overlapping of the newly identified frames (the disregarded frame and overshadowed frame) with the original frames identified by Nacos (2005) (the physical appearance frame, the family connection frame, terrorist for the sake of love, the women's liberation/equality frame, the tough-as-males/tougher-than-men frame, and the bored, naïve, out-of-touch-with-reality frame). Furthermore, the frames identified in the current study have quite different characteristics than the original frames identified by Nacos (2005). While her frames are rooted in the representations of female politicians and are individual each very distinctive, the frames in the current study are more rooted in the feminist media studies and tend to be broader in scope.

### Future directions

More research is needed to better understand the media's representation of gender and terrorism. While the current study focused only on domestic terrorism, more work is needed on the media's representation of global terrorism. Future research can also extend these findings by looking at different types of media (television, movies, political advertisements, etc.) to see if there are differences in the way in which the mass media represents male and female terrorists and different types of extremist ideology. Furthermore, a better understanding of the influence of the media's portrayal of terrorism, namely female perpetrators, on the general public's perception of terrorism is needed. The overshadowed frame should also be further studied within the context of the media's representation of other types of crimes and/or professional occupations. Research should examine if female politicians are more frequently overshadowed when compared to male politicians. Additionally, looking at the frames identified by Nacos (2005) and the frames identified in the current study within the context of female and male preparators of non-terrorist related crimes would provide a better picture of how the mass media represents male and female offenders.

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